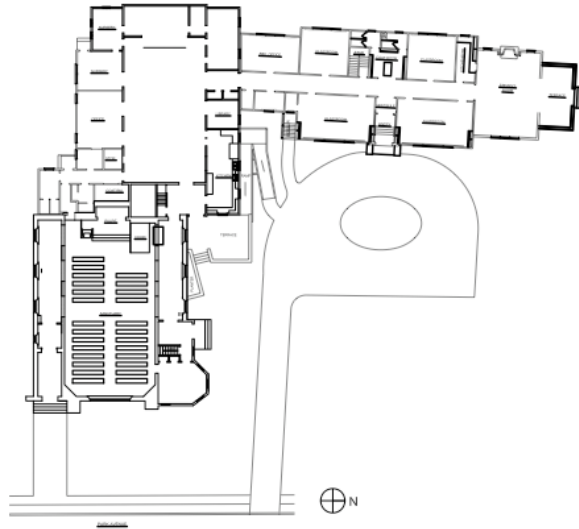


## **Section III**

### **Architectural Description**

### SECTION III - ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION, CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS, CHRONOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTION & HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

#### PLAN AND ORGANIZATION:



The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield occupies a single-story building made up of a Gothic Revival Church, referred to as the Sanctuary, a Parish Hall, and a contemporary Educational Wing, known as the Stevens Wing. The buildings are all connected and create an L-shaped plan. There is a below grade basement at the east end of the Sanctuary and at the north end of the complex at the Stevens Wing. There is a crawl space at the center section under the Parish Hall. The building was constructed in four distinct phases, which are evident by the different materials, styles and roof configuration. Construction of the original Sanctuary was completed in 1892. Originally built, and always

occupied, by the Unitarian Society, the Sanctuary was called All Soul's Church. See Appendix A-Photographs #1, #2, & #10. It has a broad, rectangular floor plan running east to west, a steeply pitched gabled roof punctured with dormers, a west gable flanked by two towers, and a projecting octagonal shaped room on the east corner. A small projection on the west elevation was the original location of the pulpit and the organ. The main Sanctuary entrance on the East Elevation (no longer used) is a covered stone porch with stone steps, bluestone paving, and a beaded board wood ceiling. See Appendix A-Photograph #2.

In 1925, the addition of a Parish Hall to the west of the Sanctuary was completed. See Appendix A-Photograph #4. It has a rectangular floor plan running east to west, with a center gabled roof and a lower shed roof over the northern portion of the Parish Hall. The Parish Hall adjoins the Sanctuary building in such a way that the south portion is concealed behind the Sanctuary and the north portion is visible from Park Avenue (east). The south side of the Parish Hall was extended in 1947 for restrooms and offices. This addition has a low-sloped roof with a small flat roof area and skylight. See Appendix A-Photograph #31.

Finally, in 1958, a fourth addition was added at the north end of the Parish Hall. This section, known as the Stevens Wing, was built to house the educational program at FUSP. See Appendix A-Photograph #6. It is rectangular in plan and runs north to south forming the long arm creating the L-shaped overall plan. There is a small meeting room and library at the north end of the Stevens Wing, known as the Stevens Room.

The Sanctuary and Minister's office are located in the original building. Offices, restrooms, a kitchen and a large assembly area with a stage are located in the Parish Hall. The Stevens Wing is the only portion of the building that utilizes the basement for public use. There are classrooms and restrooms on the first floor and additional classrooms on the basement level.

There are four entrances to the complex of buildings all located off Park Avenue. There are two Sanctuary entrances the stone porch on the south east corner and the north porch. The main entrance used today is into the Parish Hall at the Powell Terrace. See Appendix A-Photograph #4. The fourth entrance is at the center east elevation of the Stevens Wing and provides access to the Classrooms and Nursery School. Other secondary entrances include double doors at the north end of the Stevens Wing, opening onto a bluestone patio and two other doors that face to the west and access the Parish Hall.

#### CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Below is an overview of the existing materials for which the conditions and recommended repairs are described in Section IV and Section V. In addition, refer to Photographs in Appendix A and Appendix C.

02 Sitework: The grade around the buildings is fairly level with a parking area and driveway that forms an oval round a small planted area in front of the east elevation of the Stevens Wing. See Appendix A-Photograph #6. A built-up masonry terrace, with bluestone paving, at the main, east-facing, entrance of the Parish Hall is known as the Powell Terrace. See Appendix C-Photograph #15 & #16. (Built as memorial to Pricilla Powell). There is a brick and concrete terrace, with bluestone paving, at the north end of the Stevens Wing. To the north of this terrace is a grassy area and a memorial garden. There are a large number of mature trees and plants adjacent to the building. There is a raised masonry planter box that extends 3.5 feet above grade adjacent to the north wall of the Church and adjoins the Powell Terrace. See Appendix A-Photograph #8). There are concrete walkways leading to each of the entrances.

03 Concrete: Concrete parging is used to cover the above grade portions of the exterior Parish Hall brick and Stevens Wing concrete foundation walls. See Appendix A-Photograph #15. The steps at the Stevens Wing terrace and at the Stevens Wing east entrance are concrete. A serpentine concrete sidewalk runs along the perimeter of the parking area, along the north and east sides of the three sections of the building.

04 Masonry: The Sanctuary is constructed of rubble stone foundation walls (approximately 1'-6" deep), which are visible in the basement. The walls above grade are brick and faced with random laid rusticated, rock-faced ashlar brownstone in a variety of sizes (34"x12", 27"x8", 3 1/2"x13", 4"x5", 18"x8"). See Appendix A-Photographs #19, #20 & #21. A row of 8" high cut stones, approximately 28" above grade, form a water table around the base of the building. These stones are random lengths (48", 70", 37", etc). Most of the visible mortar on the exterior is not original and has a high cement content. See Appendix B for a detailed description of the mortars. The joints are tooled with a raised profile beaded finish.

The Parish Hall foundation walls are brick covered with exterior cement parging. The Stevens Wing foundation is constructed of Concrete Masonry Units (CMU) covered on the exterior with cement parging. There is a brick chimney at the southwest corner of the Parish Hall and another brick chimney on the west wall of the Stevens Room at the north end of the Stevens Wing.

05 Metals: There are metal security grilles over the rear (west) windows on the Parish Hall and the Stevens Wing. See Appendix A-Photograph #50. A metal post supports a handrail on the east entrance to the Stevens Wing. There is a decorative metal railing at the north entrance to the

Sanctuary. There are metal finials on the two towers and on two of the north facing dormers on the Sanctuary. See Appendix A-Photograph #23.

06 Wood: The roof over the Church is supported by heavy timber trusses that run from north to south. See Appendix C-Photograph P3.0. The side aisles are supported by shed roof framing (See Appendix C-Photograph #2). There are boxed wood posts supporting the porch roof over the north facing entrance to the Church and both towers have wooden cornices. The east facing gable of the Church has molded wood rake boards with dentils. See Appendix A-Photograph #25. The rear (west) gable end wall has a painted wooden broken pediment trim. See Appendix A-Photograph #29.

The Parish Hall has exposed heavy timber trusses, at the ceiling, which support the pitched roof. Wood trim on the Parish Hall includes an overhanging roof eave with flat wood rake boards at each of the gable ends. Two curved wooden brackets support the flat roof that covers the east-facing entrance to the Parish Hall.

Note: For additional information on wood framing, refer to the Structural Engineers Report in Appendix C.

07 Thermal and Moisture Protection: The original slate shingle roof on the Sanctuary was replaced, in 1981, with asphalt shingles, however the dormer cheek walls have retained their slate. The shallower pitched side aisle roofs were originally flat pan metal and are now covered over with asphalt shingles. There are half-round metal gutters and rectangular corrugated metal downspouts along the north and south elevations. The Parish Hall roof is slate and the Stevens Wing roof is asphalt shingled. The flat and shallow sloped roofs adjoining the Parish Hall slate roof to the south are covered with a built up roofing material.

There are flat pan metal roofs on the Parish Hall dormers. The flat roof covering the East Entrance Porch to the Parish Hall has a flat pan metal roof that has been covered by built-up roofing.

Both the Parish Hall and the Stevens Wing are clad in painted wooden shingles. The west elevation, gable end wall at the Church is also clad in painted, wood shingles.

08 Openings - Windows: One of the dominant architectural features of the Sanctuary is a large lancet arched window facing Park Avenue (East Elevation). This window, known as the Robinson Window, has a wooden frame and wooden tracery. See Appendix A-Photograph #49. The window was originally glazed with square lead work similar to the smaller lancet windows, however in 1947 the window was replaced with stained glass. (See Appendix E for more detailed information). The other first floor windows at the Sanctuary have wooden frames with lancet arched, leaded colored glass windows. See Appendix A-Photograph #51. The lead pattern has a square design with colored glass approximately 4" square. Most of the first floor windows form groups of three arches except for a few that have one arch. On the north elevation one set of three windows was replaced with memorial stained glass, known as the Rose Window. (See Appendix E for more detailed information about the Church windows.) Three sets of dormers with pairs of lancet arched windows are installed on each of the north and south sides of the Sanctuary. See Appendix A-Photograph #3.

Windows in the Parish Hall are 8/8 double-hung wood framed. Three of these windows were replaced with contemporary metal-framed 8/8 double hung windows with aluminum storm screens. However, a number of the original wood windows are extant. One of the original windows is located on the North Elevation where the Parish Hall meets the link to the Stevens Wing. The other original windows are located on the west side of the building. There are three flat shed dormers with wood framed 4x4 casement windows on the south side of the Parish Hall. Additional wooden casement windows are located at the east and west gable and at the south-facing gable end of the extension of the Parish Hall.

All of the first floor Stevens Wing windows are contemporary metal-framed with metal storm and screen windows. The basement windows at the Stevens Wing are 8/8 double-hung. See Appendix A-Photograph #52. Most of them extend 18" below grade and have recessed window wells lined with corrugated metal. There is no drainage and no cleanout in these wells. A few of the basement windows on the west elevation have wood sills that are sitting directly at grade. The basement windows at the Church are boarded up with plywood and most of the original window sash and frames appear to have been removed.

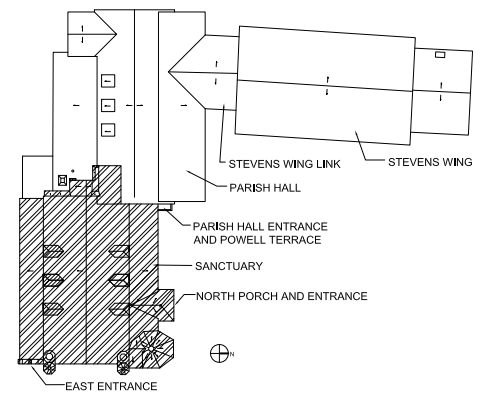
Doors: The Sanctuary has two sets of double wooden doors. They are located at the covered porches at the East and North Church Entrances. The doors are mortise and tenoned, double paneled. The recessed panels are infilled with diagonal battens. The top panel is a lancet arch the bottom panel is rectangular. The doors are finished with a dark wood stain. See Appendix A-Photograph #54.

The Parish Hall has three exterior doors. They are all wooden doors with glass panes. See Appendix A-Photograph #4. The Park Avenue entrance to the Parish Hall, (which now serves as the main entrance to the buildings), has wood double doors with four by three horizontal glass panes on each door and a wooden panel in the lower half of each door. They are painted to match the green color of the window trim on the Sanctuary. Additionally, the Parish Hall has two rear (west) doors. One of these is a contemporary metal fire door. The second is an older wooden door with glass panes in the upper half. There are two sets of double exterior doors at the first floor level of the Stevens Wing. The main entrance on the East Elevation has contemporary double metal doors with metal frames. The doors have three by four vertical glass panes in the upper half. At the north elevation of the Stevens Wing there are a set of wooden doors with 18 glass panes and matching fixed side lites. The frame, sash, and mullions are stained with a dark wood, clear finish. There is a basement door at the link between the Parish Hall and the Stevens Wing. It is accessed by a concrete stairway. See Appendix A-Photograph #13. The door is contemporary metal with glazed panels in the upper half. There is a painted metal access hatch Bilco door to the Sanctuary basement on the North Elevation.

#### 10 Miscellaneous Fixtures and Attachments:

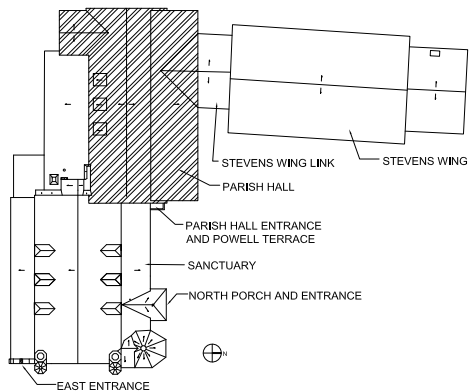
There are a number of extraneous surface mounted attachments around the building. These include conduit, electric light fixtures, pipes and other utilities penetrating the walls from the interior. See Appendix A-Photographs #55 & #56.

## CHRONOLOGY OF CONSTRUCTION:



### 1892

The construction of the original Sanctuary referred to as All Souls' Church was completed in 1892. Oscar S. Teale designed the single story Gothic Revival, rusticated stone Church. The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield congregation dedicated the building on May 11, 1892. Teale was a local architect who had designed a number of significant stone churches in the area.



### 1925

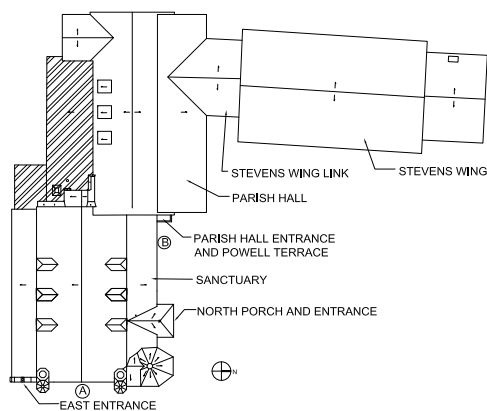
The cornerstone for the Parish Hall was laid in January 1925. The building, designed by a congregant, J.T. Tubby, was completed and dedicated on June 7, 1926. Anthony Albert of Scotch Plains was the builder.

### 1929

Harry Keith White, made significant changes to the interior of the Church.

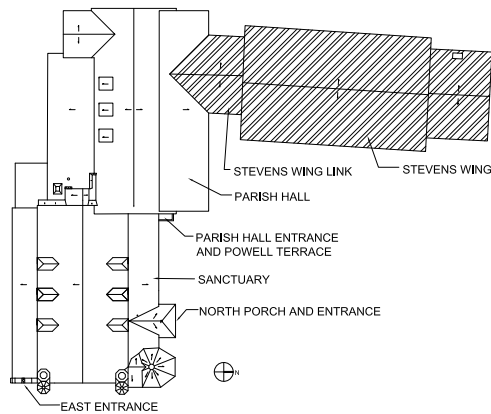
### 1935

A new organ was dedicated in.



### 1947-1948

The Parish Hall was expanded to the south to contain the present-day offices and restrooms. On June 8, 1947 the Robinson window (A) was dedicated in honor of Reverend Robinson, minister from 1919-1950. The window depicts the six great religions including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Chinese Yin and Yang philosophy. Oliver Smith of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania created the window. Another stained glass window (B), created by Mr. Smith was installed in the north elevation of the Church. This window was dedicated in honor of an active congregant, Horace Stevens. This window is called the Rose window because of its dominant color, red. This color was chosen because Mr. Stevens' hobby was raising roses. The window depicts the Unitarian Service Committee, peace doves, stars and planets.



#### 1958

The Stevens Wing was completed in February 1958. In order to accomplish this construction, First Unitarian Society of Plainfield purchased the adjoining property facing 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

#### 1977

After a fundraising campaign, beginning in 1974, construction work was completed which involved refurbishing the Parish Hall kitchen, and included a kitchen exhaust hood and fan, and a new commercial dishwasher and range the landscape, vestibule and the construction of the Powell Terrace, in memory of Priscilla S. Powell.

1981 A new asphalt shingle roof was installed on the Sanctuary.

1995-96 Air conditioning system was installed to serve the Sanctuary and Parish Hall.

2005-06 The kitchen was again refurbished with a new range, commercial dishwasher, new sinks, new garbage disposal, warming oven and new refrigerator. New windows, walls, ceiling and floors were also completed.

#### HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE:

The First Unitarian Society of Plainfield is a contributing building in the Van Wycke Brooks Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, the Sanctuary is an outstanding example of the work of Oscar S. Teale, who was notable for having built a large number of the church's and other structures in Somerset and Union Counties of New Jersey. He was also an accomplished magician and was acquainted with Harry Houdini, serving as a pallbearer at Houdini's funeral and designing a memorial in Houdini's honor. Teale taught at Columbia's Teachers College in NYC and the Avery Library at Columbia has archived architectural drawings for more than 46 Churches and other buildings that he designed.

The Unitarian Congregation of Plainfield was first organized in 1889, at a time when the City of Plainfield was becoming a wealthy commuter suburb. A building committee, comprised of many prominent citizens including the City's mayor, was formed in 1890 and the Church, originally named All Souls' Church, was completed in 1892. It is the oldest Unitarian Society building in New Jersey and has continuously housed a Unitarian congregation for more than 100 years.

In addition to Teale, a number of prominent artists, designers and architects, many of who were members of the congregation, contributed to the additions and alterations of the buildings. The Parish Hall addition, built in 1925, was designed by Josiah T. Tubby; an internationally known artist, Jonas Lie, painted a mural above the pulpit in 1929; stained glass artists Cateau DeLeeuw and Oliver Smith designed and built the dramatic Robinson window at the front of the Church in 1947.

Refer to National Register Nomination prepared by Stacy E. Spies in Appendix F for additional information on the history of the buildings.